

# APPENDIX

## THE THREE STATES

(*Avasthātraya*)

THE STUDY OF the three states of waking, dreaming, and deep sleep in the investigation of Ultimate Reality is the unique feature of the Vedānta philosophy. These three states are mentioned in the major Upanishads and the *Brahma Sūtras*. The *Māndūkya Upanishad* confines itself to a discussion of them in order to establish the existence of Turiya, or Transcendental Consciousness.

The basis of knowledge is experience. We usually gather knowledge from the experience of the waking state, believing that it alone possesses certainty. But the life of a man includes the three states of waking, dreaming, and deep sleep, each with its own experience. Since the waking state is only a part of life, the experience gathered in that state is only a partial experience. Hence knowledge derived from the waking state can lead only to partial truth, not to the whole truth. The knowledge of science, speculative philosophy, theology—in fact any knowledge derived from the experience of the waking state alone—must fall short of the whole truth.

Similarly, the knowledge derived from study of the dream state and of deep sleep, separately, is only partial truth.

It appears that knowledge derived mainly from waking experience is the foundation of a materialistic or realistic philosophy; that knowledge derived from the study of dreams produces idealism, mysticism, or spiritualism; and that knowledge gathered from deep sleep is responsible for the philosophy of nihilism. But when the experiences of the three states are co-ordinated, one obtains a completely different philosophy, which should include all forms of knowledge, be they in the domain of religion or of science. The Reality arrived at through study of the three states does not conflict with or contradict any other form of reality; the knowledge of such Reality must promote the welfare of all. Little truths alone meet with contradiction, not the great Truth. The whole includes the parts; it is not in conflict with them.


Speculative philosophy and dogmatic theology are guided by intellect, emotion, feeling, or sense in arriving at the goals of their research. These instruments of knowledge are related either to the waking or to the dream

state and are therefore vitiated by contradictions. Vedānta claims that its investigation is guided by reason. It defines reason as the instrument by which the three states are comprehended and co-ordinated.

### WAKING AND DREAM EXPERIENCE

It is generally admitted that waking experience and dream experience are different from each other: the **objects perceived in dreams are unreal**, and those perceived in the waking state are real. But it is also said that "things are not what they seem."

**Dream objects are felt**, while the dream lasts, to be **as real as** those of the **waking state**. In dreams, as in the waking state, there exists a sense of distinction between real and unreal. While dreaming, the sleeping person regards the dream state as the waking state. He somehow distinguishes it from other states; otherwise he could not regard the dream experiences as real, even for the time being. Further, one sometimes sees illusory objects in a dream and knows them to be so while dreaming. Thus one somehow makes a **distinction between illusion and reality in the dream itself**.

 **Second**, it is contended that **dream objects are subjective**, that is to say, that they are the creation of the sleeper's mind, whereas **waking objects are real**, that is to say, **they exist outside, independent of the perceiver**, and are perceived by means of sense-organs. What makes this difference is said to be the instrumentality of the sense-organs, which are active in the waking state and inactive in sleep. After awaking, a man realizes that he was dreaming, because he knows then that he saw the objects in his dream though his senses were not functioning. But a distinction made on such grounds is not plausible. The sense-organs and the physical bodies of the dream world are as active as those of the waking world. **In dreams, too, one not only thinks, but touches, tastes, smells, hears, and sees objects** though they are only creations of the dream. A man dreams that he sees a mountain, climbs it, and feels satisfied after reaching the top. Thus there exists not only an ego but also external objects and inner feelings in the dream state as in the waking. But the sense-organs which appear to be real in one state are found to be unreal in the other.

**Third**, **dream experience is said to be private**, its objects and actions being known to the dreamer and none else, **whereas waking experience is shared by others**. But the application of the idea of "private" or "public" to distinguish the objects of one state from those of another is not valid. Like the waking world, the dream world, too, has not only its sun, moon, and stars, but other living beings as well, who share with the dreamer the experience of the dream. Dream experience has as much of public character, so long as the dream lasts, as waking experience.

**Fourth**, **waking percepts—in contrast to dream percepts—are said to**



endure for an appreciable and measurable period of time. But dream objects are also observed to endure for months and years, though the dream may not last for more than a few minutes as measured by the standard of time of the waking mind. The sense of time is present in both states: each has its independent standard of measurement, although the standard of one state, appearing real in that state, is proved false in the other.

Fifth, it is observed that the money a dreamer possesses cannot purchase his bread and butter when he feels hungry in the waking state. But likewise, the money owned by a waking person does not serve a similar purpose in his dreams. If the test of reality is pragmatic, it can be said that dream objects are means to dream ends just as much as waking objects are means to waking ends. A sense of causal relation is present in the dream mind as it is in the mind of the waking person. But what is considered logical sequence in the waking state may not always obtain in the dream. Each state has its own notion of propriety, and each is falsified by the other, in spite of the belief that each is dealing with reality.

Sixth, dream percepts are often found to be queer and fantastic, the likes of which are not seen in the world of the waking man. But such percepts, however absurd, appear perfectly normal to the dreamer. Obviously he has his own notions of time, space, distance, and form. But his standards are unreal to the waking person. Similarly, the standards of the waking state do not apply in the dream, though both standards have their application in their respective spheres.

Seventh, it may be objected that dream experiences are refuted by waking ones. A man, after awaking, can judge the merits of the dream; but waking experiences are not found to be unreal in dreams, nor does a person sit in judgement, while dreaming, over his waking experiences. Therefore the two states cannot be placed on the same level. In answer it may be said that to the dreamer the dream is a waking state. In fact, whether a person is awake or dreaming, what passes before him is simply a succession of waking states, one group of real objects coming after another. For the special feature of the waking state is that the objects perceived in it are felt to be real. It is the objects of one waking state that are judged in another waking state. When these objects turn out, in the other state, to be unreal, that state is called a dream. Thus it is only one waking state that is refuted by another waking state. The dream state continually suggests that the waking world, though different, has no higher value than the dream world.

That waking objects are no more real than dream objects can be learnt in the waking state itself. In the same waking state a past experience may be proved false and regarded as a dream. In the illusory perception of a snake in a rope, the snake which was taken to be real is subsequently proved to be a mere idea. And both dreams and past waking experiences are



nothing but ideas or memories. The difference between a dream and an illusion is that the former refers to an entire state whereas the latter covers only a part of a state.<sup>1</sup>

**Eighth,** it is said that what gives the indisputable stamp of reality to the waking state is that **we return to the same objects**—such as children, relatives, friends, and house—**every time we awake**, whereas we do not see the same objects in the successive dream states. In reply Vedānta declares that the dream state is a waking state for the dreamer, as has already been pointed out, and one knows a state to be a waking state only when there is the feeling that the objects seen are real and, as such, remain the same in all waking states. This feeling must be present even while a person is dreaming; otherwise he cannot regard the dream as a waking state and the objects seen in it as real. Whether we actually return to the same objects in every waking state is a matter for investigation confined to the waking state. But the fact remains that we have the feeling that real objects are unchanging and that all waking states have the characteristic of presenting real or unchanging objects.

**Ninth,** it may be contended that if the objects of the waking state are exactly like those of the dream state, then our beloved kith and kin would be no more than ideas, like those of our dream-world relatives. Such an attitude is repugnant to our feelings. The reply of Vedānta is that **our relatives seen in the waking or the dream state are as real as the "I," or ego, which deals with them. Their physical bodies also are as real as our bodies in those states.** For instance, if a man in the waking state regards his ego or body as real, then his kith and kin are also to be regarded as real in that state. Confusion arises when a man thinks his body or ego to be real and the bodies or egos of others to be mere ideas.

**Tenth,** it may be urged that **in dreams the objects one takes to be real are mere ideas**, whereas in the waking state the real appears real, and the unreal, unreal (i.e. mere ideas). Further, in the waking state a man has a more clear and logical mind than while he is dreaming. In reply it may be said that **a person fully awake sometimes sees a snake to be real, whereas after inquiry he finds it to be only a rope.** Till the truth is known, the snake is real to him, though in fact it is only an idea projected by his mind. (If a person has never before seen a snake, but has seen something

<sup>1</sup> The story is told of a Hindu farmer and his wife seated by the dead body of their only son. The farmer was in a reflective mood but did not shed a single tear. When his wife reproached him for not showing any emotion, he said that on the previous night he had dreamt he was a king and his wife was the queen. They were blest with seven sons all endowed with princely qualities. Suddenly he awoke and the children disappeared. Now he was wondering whether he should mourn the loss of those seven children or of the one son lying dead before them.



else, such as a stick, which resembles a rope, he would see a stick in the dusk, that is to say, he would see what his memory produces.) Illusions of this kind are common enough to establish the fact that ideas, though only subjective and mental, do appear real and objective, being actually perceived by the sense-organs. Therefore it is not in dreams alone that ideas appear real: in the waking state a similar phenomenon takes place.

One may remark, however, that illusions are exceptions and that **one sees in the waking state many realities which are not illusions.** In reply Vedānta declares that nothing is more real to a man than his own body. He had a body when he was six years old, and now, at sixty, he has a body too. But what he thought most real at six is no longer there at sixty, at which age the former body is only a memory or idea. Following the same line of reasoning, it may be asked if there is anything in the world that one takes to be real which is not found to be only a memory or idea. The example of the body, it may be objected, implies a lapse of time. But it can be said in answer that one and the **same object is sometimes found to appear at the same moment in different forms to different persons; and these appearances are real to the persons concerned. What one sees are only forms or ideas.**

Whence do these forms come and whither do they go? This problem need not be discussed here. The purpose of this chapter is not to study the phenomena of waking experience by themselves, but to co-ordinate them with those of dream experience. This study raises two closely connected issues: (1) What is the nature of reality as found in the objects perceived? (2) When, or under what circumstances, do we become aware of the nature of such reality?

(1) **The objects perceived by the senses in the waking and dream states are both, in reality, ideas.** This fact can be known if the inquirer detaches himself from both states and judges objectively the nature of the objects of experience. When one is awake, one cannot argue that the waking state is the same as the dream state or that one is only dreaming. The states are different. The objects of the waking state are real, while those seen in a dream are mere ideas. The dream is always in the past and is a memory; the waking state is present and actual. That one sees mere ideas both in the waking and in the dream state is known only when one detaches oneself from both states and then views them objectively.

It is perceptibility by the sense-organs that is said to differentiate a real object from an idea. This is how a real snake is distinguished from the idea of a snake. But we are also aware that an illusory snake may be seen in place of a rope—of course, only till the truth about the rope is known. And though the snake is merely an idea, it is nevertheless perceived by the sense-organs, which mark it as a real object. Likewise, turning to



the dream state, we find that all the objects perceived there are real and that the state itself is a waking one while the dream lasts. But on inquiry we realize that all the real objects of this waking state are mere ideas.

Now suppose we are back again in the waking state. The objects of the waking state are perceived by the senses and therefore appear to us perfectly real. But what is their true nature? Vedānta, from its detached standpoint, says that they are ideas. Where has one seen an *objective* reality that does not pass into the region of memory or ideas but always remains real? There is no objective reality that is not found, on inquiry, to be an idea. This truth is not easily grasped if one limits one's inquiry to the waking state alone. To a Vedāntist things are thoughts; objects are never known to exist apart from thought. The objects seen, as well as the ideas we have of them, are equally thoughts, as in a dream, though they appear to be different. Some of the idealistic philosophers of the West, too, have held that perceived objects are mere states of the mind. But their arguments are based on the experience of the waking state alone and therefore are not always convincing.

(2) When, or under what circumstances, does one know that the reality behind the objects is a mere idea? This truth dawns sometimes of itself and sometimes after conscious effort. After a man's sleep is over, he wakes naturally and becomes disillusioned about the reality of the objects he saw in his dreams. Or again, a person who mistakes a rope for a snake goes near it without any thought of making conscious inquiry, and learns the truth. Likewise, a man who has acquired enough knowledge and wisdom about the world (which Vedānta holds may require several lives or generations of experience and observation) attains without much conscious effort the knowledge that the world is an idea. Or again, one may set about inquiring into the nature of perceived objects, utilize the experience of others, and realize the truth. Such a pursuit of truth is well known to modern thinkers, though they confine themselves to the data of the waking state alone.

Have ideas any of the reality which they seem to possess? The question has been debated for many centuries by philosophers of East and West, and many of them, basing their views on data supplied by the waking state alone, have held that ideas do possess reality, or at least a degree of reality. But the answer given by Vedānta is related to the investigation of the third state, or deep sleep. In taking up that investigation it will be useful to bear in mind some of the results of the study of the two states of waking and dreaming.

(1) Undeveloped minds, like those of very young children, often make no distinction between the waking and dream states. Primitive people think they see real ghosts, spirits, gods, and angels in dreams. On the other



hand, those who take appearances to be real regard the objects seen in the waking state as different from those seen in dreams. But through proper investigation one realizes that the **names and forms of both the waking and the dream state are unreal**, that is to say, mere ideas.


(2) In each state, the objects, though mere ideas, are as real as the "I," or ego, of that state.

(3) Time, space, and causality, which are indissolubly associated with objective reality, both in the waking and in the dream world, are mere ideas which vary with the individual. The standard by which one judges time, space, and causality in one state contradicts that by which one judges them in the other. In other words, to use a modern term, they are relative.

(4) Dream experience helps us understand the real nature of waking experience, and vice versa.

### DEEP SLEEP

Let us now turn to deep sleep. A person in deep sleep is not conscious of anything. At that time he does not perceive objects, as he does in the waking and dream states. He is not aware of thought, feeling, or any activity of the mind. If he is conscious of any of these, he is either awake or dreaming. Where then do objects (including thoughts and feelings) disappear during deep sleep? Vedānta holds that any supposition or inference about the whence or whither of ideas in deep sleep is futile. Ideas (including names and forms) are mere appearances. Therefore one cannot ask whence they come and whither they go. The illusory snake seen in the rope comes neither from outside nor from the rope, neither does it disappear in the rope—simply because the snake is an appearance.

The indisputable fact is that the **mind in deep sleep is not aware of the existence of ideas anywhere. The sleeper is not conscious even of his "I," or ego, which is indissolubly associated with the world of ideas.** And it cannot be said that the world disappears into the "I" or into "my mind," for neither of these is known to exist in deep sleep. Further, the "I" is a part of the cognized world; it is the correlative of the "not-I" and cannot create or wipe out the world to which it belongs—a feat which  lipsists have vainly sought to perform. If everything disappears, whence do ideas or the world come when we awake? They must have a basis of existence. They cannot be the effect of non-existence. To postulate non-existence, one must also admit an existence which is aware of it. **There cannot be any such entity as absolute non-existence, since that implies the non-existence of one's awareness, which bears witness to everything, including non-existence.** Again, the absence of objects cannot establish the absence of the light that illumines them. Similarly, the absence of percepts or cognitions in deep sleep cannot establish the absence of the perceiver or



cognizer. Since ideas, whatever may be their nature, cannot be the effect of non-existence, so long as they are known to exist, and since there exists in deep sleep neither "I" nor "my mind" into which ideas may merge, Vedānta says that what exists in deep sleep is Mind, that is to say, pure mind, or Spirit, denoted by the Vedāntic word *Prājna*.

#### THE NATURE OF IDEAS

An idea, as distinguished from Reality, means what is mental or unsubstantial and appears and disappears in an instant without leaving any trace of its whereabouts. If, when ideas appear, they are known to exist in Mind, and if they are known to disappear in the same Mind, then the only inference is that they resolve themselves into the Mind-stuff, that is, as Vedānta puts it, they become indistinguishable from Mind. The illustration of waves and the calm sea may be given: the waves arise from the sea and are dissolved in it. In deep sleep, Mind remains in an undifferentiated state and is called *Avyākṛita*. Inasmuch as the universe is nothing but ideas, and ideas are in Mind, the universe is in Mind. But Mind cannot be said to be within "my body" or "my ego," as unphilosophical people assume; for Mind has no limitations of space. This Mind is called *Chitta* by Gaudapāda in his *Kārikā*.

There exists, in deep sleep, an awareness or consciousness without content. The use of these terms is not free from ambiguity. Consciousness is always associated with a content; in deep sleep no such content is apprehended. Further, the words *consciousness* and *awareness*, by themselves, both look like pure abstractions. But an abstraction cannot give rise to anything like the universe, which appears real and substantial. Vedānta says that this awareness is nothing but Mind, the reality of which is directly and immediately perceived.

Vedānta sometimes designates Mind as *Sākshin*, the Witness or Onlooker, which is never an object of thought. This *Sākshin* is not the "I," which disappears in deep sleep, although when ideas are cognized, *Sākshin*, or Mind, functions for the time being as the "I," or subject. *Sākshin* is not real in the sense that a sense-perceived object is real; on the other hand, its unreality cannot be conceived. Therefore it is said to be neither real nor unreal, but supra-real. It is beyond time and space, which condition objects in the waking and dream states. It is the only entity whose non-existence cannot be imagined.

It has been stated that Mind, or *Sākshin*, is the source of all ideas, and consequently of the universe. This conception, however, belongs only to the relative plane. When one sees the universe of ideas and its appearance and disappearance, then one regards *Sākshin* as its source. But since Mind is the sole entity that exists in deep sleep, and since there exists in



that state no trace of the universe, **Mind is truly devoid of relationship.** All relationships, including the basic relation of cause and effect, have been refuted by Gauḍapāda in the fourth chapter of the *Kārikā*. The notion of causality is the result of avidyā, or ignorance. It applies to the phenomenal state, when a multiplicity of objects is perceived and one seeks to establish a relationship between them. That is why, **when Vedānta speaks of Sākshin from the waking standpoint, it uses the language of causality and describes it as the source and final merging-place of all ideas.**<sup>2</sup>

Vedānta does not teach that material objects like the sun, the moon, and the stars; men, animals, and birds; trees, flowers, and mountains, all disappear every day in deep sleep, as if they were nothing. This disappearance might be admitted as true if one confined oneself to waking experience alone and saw only partial truth. But when one envisages the whole truth, from the standpoint of the three states, one does not really see that such physical objects are totally destroyed, leaving behind a vacuum. **The universe is not unreal to one who looks at it as Sākshin.** It is Mind, or Pure Consciousness, immortal and unchanging. That which is real can never be unreal, and the reality of the unreal can never be conceived. Everything seen, felt, or thought of is the One Entity, of whose non-existence it is impossible even to conceive. It is the very nature of Reality to appear as the phenomenal universe without undergoing any change as regards its non-duality, infinity, and eternity. **All that exists is Mind, just as all that exists in the ocean is the ocean itself.** The waves and bubbles cannot be conceived as existing independent of the ocean. Only when one imagines the waves to have an independent existence can one think of their source and their place of final disappearance.

This grand truth can be realized through the understanding and co-ordination of the experiences of the three states. The faculty by which the three states are co-ordinated is called Vedāntic reasoning. Intuition and intellectual reasoning, as applied to religion, science, and other human pursuits, are the Vedāntic reasoning functioning in the waking state.

Similarly, the Personal God and such other **spiritual ideals as Krishna, Buddha, and Christ, are only waves in the infinite ocean of Mind, or Consciousness, immediately and directly felt as "I am."** They all arise from and disappear into Mind. This truth adds a new flavour and richness to all religious phenomena. We learn that different religions and spiritual ideals are necessary for diverse temperaments. They are not contradictory; on the contrary, they are so many symbols or paths leading to one and the same supersensuous Reality.

**Consciousness, or Mind, is directly realized only as it exists in "me," and not as it exists in other creatures.** This Awareness functions as "I"

<sup>2</sup> See *Mā. Up. Gau. Kā. IV. 26-28.*



when the latter distinguishes itself from the rest of the world; and it is the same Awareness that is conscious of the empirical ego and the three states, as its objects, when it contemplates their appearance and disappearance. This Awareness is called Ātman and is realized as "I am Ātman" and "I am He" or as "Thou art Ātman" and "Thou art That." The God-head regarded as the Creator and Preserver of the universe becomes identical with Ātman when the unphilosophical notion of causality is destroyed by means of Vedāntic reasoning. Then one realizes the sublime Vedāntic truth that all that exists is Ātman.